

## **Sexual education of young adolescents in the context of a parental style**

Marina Matejevic, Milica Petkovic

University of Nis, Faculty of Philosophy, Serbia

E-mail address: marina.matejevic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

**Keywords:** Sexual education, parenting style, authoritarian parenting style, authoritative parenting style.

**ABSTRACT.** The research was organized with an aim to determine whether there is a correlation between sexual education in a family and parenting styles. Understanding a parenting style, we started from the theoretical concept of D. Baumrind. The research used the following instruments: The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) Robinson, CC, Mandleco, B., Olsen, SF, & Hart, CH (2001), Parent / Adolescent Communication (PAC-J / M) James Jaccard, Patricia J. Dittus and Vivian V. Gordon (2000) & Miller (1998). Factor analysis showed that a dominant feeling among adolescents was shame to talk with parents about sex and contraception. We found statistically significant positive correlation between adolescent embarrassment and authoritarian parental style from a mother 0.546, and authoritarian parental style from a father 0.276, both significant at the level of 0.01, which confirms the hypothesis that the authoritarian style is associated with inadequate sexual education. The research results indicate the need for awareness of parents about the importance of sexual education because inadequate sexual education in family is a predictor for future risky sexual behavior. The results also point to the role of schools in educating parents in the context of a parenting style and sexual education.

### **1. PROBLEMS OF SEXUAL EDUCATION IN A FAMILY**

Sexual education is of crucial importance in family relationships, relationships between parents and children, the way parents interact with children. Properly directed sexual education in a family should provide: correct psychosexual development and formation of personality, formation of human relations between the sexes, formation of a stable and harmonious family in which parents should create and develop healthy offspring (Jovanovic and Jovanovic, 1998). If parents are authoritarian in relationships with children, then, moral principles that are acquired in a family have no practical value, because they are not adopted in intimate relationships with parents, but imposed and disappear along with rejection of authority that imposed them.

Parents in many different ways respond to a child's sexuality. According to the categorization of Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, parents can be classified into four groups according to the way how they react to sexuality: sexually repressive, sexually avoiding, sexually obsessed and sexually expressive (Masters, Johnson i Kolodny, 2006: 232).

Sexually repressive parents give their children a strong message that sex is bad and corrupt, and strictly prohibit rude words, cracking jokes and nudity. Children are most often raised in accordance with traditional stereotypes of gender roles. Their sex education can be summed up in two sentences: "It is dangerous" and "wait until marriage".

Sexually avoiding parents are more tolerant having a view that sexuality is healthy, not bad, but this intellectual viewpoint is opposed by shame and inaccessibility when one mentions sex. They do not convey negative attitudes toward sex, but they tend to avoid open discussion about sex, or turn these discussions into a long lecture. These parents are used to an approach "here's how it looks technically" intentionally omitting a warm, human side of sexuality and love, which is a part of sexuality.

Sexually obsessed parents look at sexuality as something healthy and good, but it goes beyond that, creating a central place of sex in family life. We can say that these parents are ultra-liberal in their attitudes toward sex, sometimes putting their own sexual lives in the central place of attention in a way that is embarrassing for children. Children often feel that their parents are sexually obsessive and feel great pressure due to attention being paid to sex.

Sexual expressive parents are able to incorporate sexuality into their family life in a balanced way. Their approach to sexuality is based on facts, sexual topics are discussed openly, whenever appropriate, reasonable boundaries are set on children's sexual behavior as sets of rules for everyone else's behavior. Sex is displayed in a healthy and a positive way, but showing it as something that is not necessary to rush for just because it exists.

We considered that these different approaches of parents and different attitudes to sex and sexual education can be connected to a parenting style, which creates a specific context in which the process takes place in family upbringing.

## **2. THE EDUCATIONAL STYLE OF PARENTS ACCORDING D. BAUMRIND'S THEORETICAL CONCEPT**

The reactions of parents to child sexuality are associated to a parental style, which establishes overall relations to a child. Understanding parenting style, we started from the theoretical concept of D. Baumrind (Baumrind, 1991), which defined three basic types of parent-child relationships: authoritarian, authoritative and permissive.

The authoritarian style, according to Baumrind, refers to a treatment of parents who have high expectations and demands from their children, primarily because they are intolerant, strict, expect obedience and show the power when their children misbehave. Authoritarian parents express their demands and expectations and do not communicate with children about the reasons behind these rules. Authoritarian parents expect absolute obedience from their children and often resort to strong punitive measures as soon as a child is away from this standard. Each dialogue is discouraged with an explanation that parents have a final say. We assume that authoritarian parents are not open for communication on the topic of sexuality, as in other contexts they cultivate one-way communication.

The authoritative style according to Baumrind characterizes parents who encourage verbal communication and initiative of a child, they make conclusions together with a child. Authoritative parents recognize their special rights as the elderly, and special interests of a child, they recognize the current quality of a child, but set standards for behavior in the future. Authoritative parents express general acceptance followed by highly verbal communication, which usually has outcomes in successful adaptation, independence and social responsibility, which certainly reflects a child's attitude toward sexuality and openness to discussions on the topic of sexuality. Baumrind connected competence of authoritative parents to the instrumental competence of their children. Instrumental competence (Baumrind, Thompson, 2002) refers to behavior that is socially responsible and independent, behavior that is friendly, not hostile to their peers, cooperativity, and non-hostility toward adults, achievements and not failures, dominance and not submissiveness, targeted, and not drift behavior.

Unlike authoritarian, permissive, indulgent parents, says Baumrind, try to behave so as not to punish, but to accept and approve impulses, desires and actions of a child. They face children with less demands for responsibility in a household and orderly behavior, but in fact, represent themselves to a child as an adjuvant that the children will use when they want to, and not as an active agent responsible for shaping and changing its current or future behavior. These parents allow a child to regulate their activities, as much as possible to avoid control exercises, and not encourage a child to respect standards defined by the outside world. Indulgent parents are more responsive than demanding. Permissive style is marked by low control followed by low demands with the general acceptance of a child, and as a result, there is often low social responsibility and illusionary independence of a child.

This style is characterized by a high level of care and clarity in communication, but a low level of control and demands for maturity. Indulgent parents allow a child freedom to choose activities, accept and support child's behavior and make little effort to enforce control over him/her or to set standards of conduct, which reflects attitudes towards sexuality of a child.

### 3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Research has been organized with an aim to determine whether there is a correlation between sexual education in family and a parenting style. We started from the assumption that the authoritarian parental style is associated with inadequate sex education in the family, while the authoritative educational style is associated with open communication on the topic of sexuality. The survey used the following instruments: The Parenting Styles and Dimensions Questionnaire (PSDQ) Robinson, C. C., Mandleco, B., Olsen, S. F., & Hart, C. H. (2001), and adapted scales Parent/Adolescent Communication (PAC-J/M) James Jaccard, Patricia J. Dittus and Vivian V. Gordon (2000) & Miller (1998). We performed the verification of metric characteristics or reliability of the scale based on Cronbach alpha test (Cronbach's Alpha). In our sample of 200 respondents, the value of Cronbach alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha) for PSDQ, is  $\alpha = 0.862$  which shows that it meets the criteria of reliability. The value of Cronbach alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) for the PAC-J / M is  $\alpha = 0.806$ , so we can also conclude that the instrument meets the criterion of reliability. The subjects of the research were eighth-grade students, where 200 students were tested.

### 4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

A factor analysis of the scale PAC-J / M, which we examined the communication between parents and adolescents on the topic of sexuality, extracted ten factors which explained a total of 72.979% of the variance, indicating good construction of the instruments. We extracted ten factors having a value of 1 or more on the basis of the factor analysis, the results of which are shown in table 1.

Table 1: A factor analysis of the scale PAC-J / M

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	11.267	28.168	28.168	11.267	28.168	28.168
2	4.487	11.219	39.386	4.487	11.219	39.386
3	3.291	8.228	47.614	3.291	8.228	47.614
4	2.317	5.794	53.408	2.317	5.794	53.408
5	1.599	3.998	57.406	1.599	3.998	57.406
6	1.508	3.769	61.175	1.508	3.769	61.175
7	1.401	3.503	64.678	1.401	3.503	64.678
8	1.219	3.048	67.726	1.219	3.048	67.726
9	1.096	2.739	70.466	1.096	2.739	70.466
10	1.005	2.514	72.979	1.005	2.514	72.979

The first factor that was singled out explains 28,168% of the variance and relates to claims of scale related to the embarrassment of adolescents and parents to talk about sex and contraception. Another factor that stood out explains 11,219% of the variance and is related to the claims that adolescents can turn to their parents if they are interested in sex and contraception. The third factor that stood out explains 8,228% of the variance and relates to the claim that -My parents gave me a lecture if I tried to talk with them about it. The fourth factor explains 5.794% of the variance and

relates to the claim-My parents would not want to answer the questions about sex and contraception. The fifth factor explains 3.998% of the variance and relates to the claims -I do not need to talk with parents about sex and contraception, because I know everything I need to know. The sixth factor explains 3.769% of the variance and relates to the claim- My parents do not know well that I want to talk about sex and contraception with them. The seventh factor explains 3,503% of the variance and relates to the claim- My parents were honest with me when I spoke to them about sex and contraception. The eighth factor explains 3.048% of the variance and relates to the claim -My parents are too old to understand me talking about sex and contraception. The ninth factor explains 2.739% of the variance and relates to the claim -When I talked to them about sex and contraception that would make my parents seem suspicious. Tenth factor explains 2.514% of the variance and relates to the claim- It would be hard to find a suitable time and place to talk with my parents about sex and contraception.

According to the classification of Masters, Johnson and Kolodny (Masters, Johnson and Kolodny, 2006), it appears that according to the assessment of adolescents the majority of parents belong to the category of sexually avoiding parents, those are parents who are tolerant in the understanding that sexuality is healthy, and not bad, unlike repressive parents, but they are characterized by shame and inaccessibility when one mentions sex. They do not convey negative attitudes about sex, but they tend to avoid open discussion about sex. The factor analysis showed that the first and the third factor exactly describe these parents, that most adolescents would feel embarrassed to talk with their parents about sex and contraception. The second and seventh factor, according to the results of our study describe parents who could be described as expressive parents who were able to bring sexuality into their family life in a balanced way. Their approach to sexuality is based on the facts about sexual issues openly discussed with children, whenever is appropriate. According to the estimates of adolescents, these are parents with whom they can openly and honestly talk about sex and contraception.

Looking at the results related to a parental style, it can be concluded that the perception of adolescent mothers' educational style is different from the perception of fathers' educational style. Results in Table 2 show us the expression of authoritative educational style of mothers and authoritarian educational style of fathers.

Table 2: Descriptive statistical measures of parenting style

Parentig style	AS	SD	Min	Max	N	Missing
Authoritative style mother/father	30,345	10,341	12,7	48,7	199	1
Authoritarian style mother/father	29,979	11,238	10,0	50,0	199	1
Permissive style mother/father	26,191	10,117	10,0	50,0	199	1
Authoritative style father/father	28,558	0,9652	14,0	50,0	196	4
Authoritarian style father/father	30,183	11,218	10,0	50,0	196	4
Permissive style father/father	25,745	0,9564	10,0	50,0	196	4

As we can see in the case of mothers, the authoritative style is the most evident, while with fathers, the authoritarian style is dominant. We obtained somewhat lower values at the permissive style of mothers and fathers, so we can conclude that the permissive parental style is the least represented one in families of adolescents in our sample. These results show that fathers in many families prefer patriarchal upbringing, while mothers in many families are less strict and gentle in relations with children, which can be connected to patterns of Serbian patriarchal culture, where the role of a father and a mother are complementary. The results of some earlier studies with older adolescents

(Matejević et al., 2014) show that both fathers and mothers are authoritative, which can be understood as a tendency toward fostering a more adequate relationships with adolescents growing up, fathers later become more flexible in relationships with adolescents.

After presenting the results related to the determination of parenting style and communication on the topic of sexuality, we wanted to see what kind of connection there is between them. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations of educational style of a mother and a father and sexual education of adolescents

The claims	Rho/P	Authoritative style mother	Authoritarian style mother	Permissive style mother	Authoritative style father	Authoritarian style father	Permissive style father
I would be embarrassed talking to my mother/father about sex and birth control	rho p n	- 0,475** 0,000 199	0,546** 0,000 199	- 0,427** 0,000 199	- 0,230** 0,001 196	0,276** 0,000 196	- 0,272** 0,000 196
I can always turn to my parents if something interests me about sex and contraception	rho p n	0,511** 0,000 199	- 0,545** 0,000 199	0,525** 0,000 199	0,281** 0,000 196	- 0,227** 0,001 196	0,192** 0,007 196
My parents would only lecture me if I tried to talk to them about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,024 0,734 199	0,117 0,099 199	0,043 0,548 199	0,033 0,644 196	0,211** 0,003 196	0,087 0,226 196
My parents would not want to answer my questions about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,361** 0,000 199	0,469** 0,000 199	- 0,274** 0,000 199	- 0,304** 0,000 196	0,402** 0,000 196	- 0,295** 0,000 196
I don't need to talk to my parents about sex and birth control; I know what I need to know.	rho p n	- 0,046 0,515 199	0,060 0,404 199	- 0,077 0,281 199	0,090 0,209 196	0,104 0,147 196	0,018 0,803 196
My parents do not know enough for me to want to talk to them about sex and birth control	rho p n	0,044 0,535 199	0,057 0,427 199	0,042 0,552 199	0,146* 0,041 196	0,008 0,916 196	0,012 0,865 196
My parents would not be honest with me if I talked to them about sex and birth control.	rho p n	0,406** 0,000 199	- 0,291** 0,000 199	0,365** 0,000 199	0,338** 0,000 196	- 0,125 0,082 196	0,224** 0,002 196
My parents are too old to be able to relate to me about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,259** 0,000 199	0,253** 0,000 199	- 0,179* 0,011 199	- 0,134 0,061 196	0,186** 0,009 196	0,059 0,411 196
I would only make my parents suspicious of me if I tried to talk to them about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,390** 0,000 199	0,440** 0,000 199	- 0,274** 0,000 199	- 0,172* 0,016 196	0,247** 0,000 196	- 0,027 0,708 196
It would be difficult to find a convenient time and place to talk to my parents about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,233** 0,001 199	0,170** 0,016 199	- 0,179* 0,011 199	- 0,098 0,170 196	0,224** 0,002 196	0,016 0,826 196
My parents are just too busy to talk to me about sex and birth control.	rho p n	0,513** 0,000 199	- 0,435** 0,000 199	0,464** 0,000 199	0,341** 0,000 196	- 0,257** 0,000 196	0,267** 0,000 196
My parents would ask me too many personal questions if I tried to talk to them about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,348** 0,000 199	0,347** 0,000 199	- 0,257** 0,000 199	0,016 0,826 196	0,143* 0,046 196	0,095 0,183 196
My parents don't want to hear what I have to say when it comes to sex and birth control.	rho p n	0,574** 0,000 199	- 0,494** 0,000 199	0,537** 0,000 199	0,329** 0,000 196	- 0,260** 0,000 196	0,291** 0,000 196
My parents and I would only argue if we were to talk about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,429** 0,000 199	0,528** 0,000 199	- 0,369** 0,000 199	- 0,279** 0,000 196	0,378** 0,000 196	- 0,185** 0,009 196
My parents would be embarrassed talking to me about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,175* 0,013 199	0,264** 0,000 199	- 0,190** 0,007 199	- 0,004 0,954 196	0,129 0,071 196	- 0,038 0,597 196
My parents would get angry if I tried to talk to them about sex and birth control.	rho p n	- 0,364** 0,000 199	0,430** 0,000 199	- 0,310** 0,000 199	- 0,281** 0,000 196	0,398** 0,000 196	- 0,174* 0,015 196
If the parents talk openly about sex they would think I was interested to experiment with sex.	rho p n	- 0,292** 0,000 199	0,525** 0,000 199	- 0,241** 0,001 199	- 0,259** 0,000 196	0,319** 0,000 196	- 0,167* 0,019 196
I feel my parents hush something when talking to me about sex.	rho p n	- 0,227** 0,001 199	0,311** 0,000 199	- 0,135 0,056 199	- 0,253** 0,000 196	0,313** 0,000 196	- 0,122 0,090 196
My parents talk openly to me about reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases	rho p n	0,593** 0,000 199	- 0,494** 0,000 199	0,548** 0,000 199	0,258** 0,000 196	- 0,201** 0,005 196	0,222** 0,002 196
When my parents talk to me about sex they understand me and care about my feelings	rho p n	0,554** 0,000 199	- 0,486** 0,000 199	0,526** 0,000 199	0,499** 0,000 196	- 0,277** 0,000 196	0,427** 0,000 196

Based on the presented results, we can see that there is a statistically significant negatively directed correlation between the authoritative and permissive parenting style of a mother with a sense of embarrassment of adolescents to talk to their parents about sex and contraception. On the other hand, there is a statistically significant positively directed correlation between the authoritarian educational style of a mother with a sense of shame in adolescents. The authoritative and permissive educational style of a mother is in a statistically significant positively directed correlation with the statement that adolescents can always turn to their mother if they are interested in something about sex and contraception. While on the other hand, the authoritarian upbringing style mother is in a statistically significant negatively directed correlation which means that adolescents cannot always turn to their mothers if they are interested in something about sex and contraception. The correlation between authoritarian and permissive parenting style of a mother with the fact that a mother would not like to answer questions about sex and contraception is statistically significant but of a negative direction, while the authoritarian upbringing style mother is in a statistically significant correlation of positive direction.

We can also see that there is a statistically significant correlation between negatively directed authoritative and permissive attitudes towards a father with a sense of shame when adolescents talk to a father about sex and contraception. On the other hand, there is a statistically significant positively directed correlation between the authoritarian attitudes towards a father with a sense of shame among adolescents. The correlation between authoritative and permissive educational style father with the fact that a father would not want to answer questions about sex and contraception is statistically significant, but in the negative direction, while fathers' authoritarian style of upbringing is in a statistically significant correlation of a positive direction. The authoritative and permissive educational style father was in a statistically significant correlation of a positive direction with the statement that a father was honest with them if they were talking about sex and contraception.

As we can see adolescents whose parents use authoritative and permissive educational style in their upbringing can always contact parents if they are interested in something about sex and contraception, taking necessary time, and they want to hear what teenagers have to say on this topic. Also, parents who prefer authoritative and permissive educational style talk openly to adolescents about reproductive health and sexually transmitted diseases. We could have expected these results, given that parents who use authoritative upbringing style tend to respect the needs and feelings of a child and that they make up the rules together. They discuss with children many important issues related to their functioning, as well as the issues related to sex and reproductive health. Many studies (Clawson & Reese-Weber, 2003) have demonstrated that a timely discussion, at the side of a mother and a father with children, is associated with later beginning of sexual intercourse and fewer sexual partners, and also related to increasing use of contraception at the side of the relation between a mother and an adolescent. Also, studies have shown that adolescents whose parents engage in authoritative upbringing style, are becoming sexually active at a later age (Todorovic et al. 2009).

Numerous studies have shown the benefits of the authoritative educational style in various aspects of functioning of adolescents. According to the findings of Baumrind (Baumrind, 1991), adolescents from authoritative families are cognitively motivated and target-oriented when compared to their peers, and they had the highest scores on tests of verbal and mathematical achievements. They were also socially responsible, they had high self-esteem and internal locus of control. Steinberg (Steinberg et al. 1992) cites studies which suggest that the relationship between authoritative parents and school success is causal, evident in younger and older adolescents, strong through different conceptualizations and operationalization of authority and generalized across different ethnic, socio-economic and family structures.

The results of our research show what is the contribution of an authoritative educational style in the context of adequate sexual education, which is also very important for the development of a healthy and sexually mature personality.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The results showed that the hypothesis from which we started in the research was confirmed, the authoritarian parental style is associated with inadequate sexual education, while the authoritative educational style is associated with open communication on the theme of sexuality. The results showed that most adolescents do not evaluate sexual education as appropriate, as there is no sufficiently open communication about sex, contraception and reproductive health. A large percentage of adolescents would feel embarrassed when talking to their parents about sex and contraception, and more than a quarter of them think that they cannot always turn to their parents if they are interested in something about sex and contraception. More than a half of adolescents considered it to be difficult to find a suitable time and place to talk to their parents about sex and contraception, and more than a quarter believe that they would have a fight with their parents when they talk about sex and contraception. The results also show that most adolescents believe that parents would not want to answer questions about sex and contraception, and they do not want to hear what they have to say on this topic. Although parents have the most important role in transferring knowledge related to sexuality, still, they are not yet ready to talk openly to children about this topic. The research results indicate that it should be worked on raising awareness of parents about the importance of sexual education, and their role, considering that they are the first educators of their children in relation to sexual education. This demonstrates the need to educate parents and the need to provide adequate support to families in achieving the tasks of sexual education, where schools need to take some responsibility in raising the pedagogical culture of parents and providing support to the family.

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